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ABSTRACT

Vocational education, reflecting society at large, has been and is guilty of sex discrimination. Currently, individual program areas are predominantly one sex or the other, with the exception of distributive education. Females comprise approximately 55 percent of all vocational education enrollments, but half of this number exit from the system without specific skill training. Agriculture/technical education/trade and industrial programs contain only limited numbers of females. While females account for 45 percent of the total distributive education enrollment, their employment is concentrated at the lower levels of retail trade. Under Education Amendments of 1972, vocational education will have from one to three years to eliminate any sex-based course requirements, both written policy or attitudinal constraints. Priority areas for vocational education include: (1) a recruiting and informational plan conducted with guidance personnel to encourage males and females to enter non-traditional vocational programs; (2) a focus in home economics courses on examining male/female role expectations and their limitations; (3) units on discrimination in the work world; and (4) additional training and education programs for mature women, especially in skilled trades and apprenticeable occupations. (EA)

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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: SEPARATE BUT NOT EQUAL

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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: SEPARATE BUT NOT EQUAL

I would like to focus my comments on the needs of women in secondary and post-secondary vocational education programs. In order to clarify what is meant by vocational education, I will present a brief definition and then identify the specific program areas which are classified within vocational education.

Vocational education is designed to prepare young people and adults to successfully enter and progress in certain occupations which require less than a four-year baccalaureate degree. The specific program areas are: Agriculture education, distributive education, health occupations, consumer and homemaking education, gainful home economics, office occupations, technical education, and trade and industrial education.

Vocational education has been and still is guilty of sex discrimination (both overt and subtle) within a society that has long believed that men and women were destined to fulfill two separate and distinct roles and "never the twain shall meet." We have done what seemingly was wanted by students, parents, the community, and employers: We prepared males to be economically independent and self-sufficient and females to be dependent upon males for economic sufficiency, personal identity, and psychological well-being.

Perhaps during the past 50 years, this situation was a rather realistic reflection of society: A dual occupational system existed which complemented well the traditional male and female role expectations. Today, however, reality paints a somewhat different picture. Factors such as the declining birth rate, the rising divorce rate, the increasing number of female heads of households, and the increased life expectancy

necessitate more serious career and occupational planning for women. Today, for increasing numbers of women, home and family do not constitute the major focus of their entire lives. Both men and women are beginning to question the concept of appropriate male and female roles, and many women are questioning why family responsibilities should exclude them from satisfying work lives when men are not expected to make the same sacrifice.

Although Vocational Education has changed in many ways to meet the needs of individuals, we have not been very cognizant of the changing occupational training needs of women. In the past, Vocational Education operated a dual sex system to meet the needs of a dual sex occupational system. With the exception of distributive education, all program areas were comprised almost completely of one sex or the other. On the secondary and post-secondary levels, agriculture, trade and industrial, and technical programs were identified as "male" occupational training areas, while consumer and homemaking education, home economics for gainful employment, health occupations, and office occupations were designated as "female" programs.

Past Discriminatory Practices

The following specific examples of what Vocational Education has been like in the very recent past should suffice for pointing out inequities. In 1971, an informal telephone survey conducted by the U.S.O.E. Office of Legislation (U.S.O.E., 1972) found that in the District of Columbia; Baltimore, Maryland; New York City; and Boston, Massachusetts, there were separate vocational schools for men and women. In the Boston school system, which had two vocational schools for each sex, the school for boys provided courses in automobile mechanics, basic electronics, cabinetmaking, carpentry, drafting, electrical technology, machine shop,

printing, plumbing, painting, sheet metal, and welding; the trade high school for girls offered programs in clothing, foods, beauty culture, and commercial art. The differences are obvious. An investigation of the wage rates for occupations taught in the Boston schools found that the average expected wage for the trades taught at the schools for girls was 47 percent less than the average for the trades taught at the boys' schools (U.S.O.E., 1972).

A study cited in a 1972 national report concerning issues and problems in evaluating vocational education (Policy Issues, 1972) provides further justification that large wage rate differentials in favor of male vocational education graduates do exist. Male vocational high school students earn about $.38 more per hour on their first job than females, after controlling for several critical sociodemographic variables. While the differences in pay vary from one program area to another, it is interesting to note that even in office occupations, where women are the predominate sex, men make $.34 more per hour than women on their first jobs.

In a recent report on sex discrimination in the Ann Arbor, Michigan public schools (Let Them Aspire, 1973), an investigation committee interviewed school-related personnel and encountered the following reasons for keeping girls out of certain courses or activities:

> "Where would a girl go to the toilet?"
>
> "But a girl would get her hair caught in the machinery."
>
> "We can't let girls do metalwork because they have to wear masks and work with sparks."
>
> "The unions won't let them in, so why should we train girls for jobs they won't be able to get?"
>
> "If girls were in the class, we'd have to make crafts instead of real woodwork."
>
> "Girls wouldn't want to take off their jewelry and tie back their hair for that course." (p. 13)

These examples provide a quick review of the obvious discriminatory practices that have existed in Vocational Education.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION - PRESENT

The present situation in Vocational Education is only slightly different from that just described. Few, if any, separate facilities exist, however, the individual program areas still are predominantly one sex or the other with the exception of distributive education (U.S.O.E., 1973).

While stereotyped attitudes held by vocational educators concerning appropriate male and female roles have surely contributed to discriminatory practices, we are confronted with still another problem: The failure of female students to select or opt for the many traditionally "male" educational opportunities which are available. This is a problem that develops over the years long before students reach vocational education programs; however, just as all educational areas have contributed to the perpetuation of sex discrimination against women, so should all areas assume some reponsibility for correcting unfair conditions.

Although the factors which contribute to the separation by sex of many vocational programs cannot be blamed only on vocational education, the resulting situation definitely seems to indicate a disproportionate effect on women. While females comprise approximately 55 percent of all vocational education enrollments, over half of this number are in non-gainful home economics courses. In recent Congressional hearings on the proposed Vocational Education legislation, a number of respresentatives expressed specific concern over the fact that more than half of all women in Vocational Education will exit from the system without specific skill training (Sex Bias, 1975).

In agriculture programs, females are 5 percent of total enrollments; in technical education programs, less than ten percent of the total enrollments are women; and females account for 12 percent of the total enrollment in trade and industrial programs (Steele, 1974). These three areas provide training for occupations which provide higher status, greater opportunities for promotion, and higher salaries that the female dominated occupational training programs.

In distributive education, females account for 45 percent of the total enrollment; however, women employed in this area are concentrated at the lower levels of the retail trade. In health occupations, women are 85 percent of the total enrollment. Although office occupations is comprised of 60 percent females, there are two areas where men exceed the number of women: In business data processing systems, males account for 51 percent of the enrollees, and in supervisory and administrative management, males comprise 72 percent (Steele, 1974). It is rather strange and somewhat ironic that even in a field that is traditionally female women enroll in supportive rather than supervisory occupations.

Consumer and homemaking education, which is the single largest vocational program in terms of enrollments, is 92 percent female. Gainful home economics which has the smallest total enrollment of any vocational program is also 92 percent female.

The women who are enrolled in the female-intensive programs of health occupations, office occupations, consumer and homemaking education and home economics-gainful are being trained for female-intensive occupations where the earnings are about 60 percent of men's earnings and where there are few opportunities for advancement. While the largest program area in Vocational Education - consumer and homemaking education - provides valuable education in human and economic well-being which is

useful for both males and females, this program area does not provide specific occupational training.

Based upon rough estimates, there also appears to be a higher student/teacher ratio in those vocational programs which are predominately female (Steele, 1974). In addition, among seven states where females account for 52 percent of the total enrollment and males 48 percent, the expenditures for female education were 37 percent of the total expenditure. There is some indication that these differences in expenditures and student/teacher ratios, which would not exist if there were a more equal sex balance in vocational courses, may be in violation of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Steele, 1974).

Today, Vocational Education is continuing to perpetuate the stereotyped conditions that exist in the work world, while providing females with occupational training which appears to be somewhat unrealistic in view of their present work life activity and economic needs.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION - FUTURE

Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Vocational Education, as well as other areas of education, will have from one to three years to implement needed change. One of the obvious changes will involve elimination of any sex-based course requirements in vocational education whether they be written policy or attitudinal constraints. The issue of sex-intensive courses, which are available to both sexes but are not chosen equally by both sexes, presents a more complex problem which cannot be solved single-handedly by vocational educators. The solution will depend upon teachers, parents, counselors, and administrators who have a sincere interest in helping both women and men realistically prepare for a future that most likely will involve marriage, family, and employment.

While vocational education alone cannot increase the numbers of men and women enrolling in non-traditional program areas, there are a variety of activities that can be implemented to hopefully speed this process. I will mention only a few.

1. A comprehensive recruitment and informational plan should be developed in conjunction with guidance personnel with specific emphasis on encouraging both males and females to enter non-traditional vocational programs. This plan should include extensive information on the career and work life activity of women and the importance of careful career planning for both sexes.

2. Home economics programs at all levels, junior high through adult, should encourage both boys and girls, men and women to closely examine male and female role expectations and the limitations these roles impose on individuals in relation to both career and personal goals.

3. Vocational educators should incorporate into their regular courses a unit on discrimination in the work world (including discrimination based on race, sex, national origin, color, religion, age, and sexual preference). Both state and federal legislation should be emphasized as well as procedures for locating legal assistance and filing complaints.

4. A very important potential vocational education population is the mature woman returning to the work world. These women, who wish to enter or re-enter the work force at approximately the age of 35, have 25 to 30 productive work years ahead of them. Unfortunately, when a woman is ready to return to paid employment any previous training or occupational experience most likely is outdated. Her need to acquire additional training and education is vital, yet the only educational programs which have been concerned with the particular needs of middle-age women have been university continuing education programs. It appears quite reasonable that the untapped area of skilled trades and apprenticeable occupations would provide excellent job opportunities for older women who are usually less concerned than the younger high school population with the sex "appropriateness" of an occupation.

I have mentioned four priority areas where vocational education can begin immediate action to implement change which will expand the awareness level and opportunities for both males and females. Vocational educators,

at all levels, have a responsibility to prepare all students, both males and females, for economically productive futures and satisfying occupational experiences. The time for affirmative action is long overdue.

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